The Settlement and Development of the Van Diemen's Land Company's Grants in North-western Van Diemen's Land, 1824-1860

H. J. W. Stokes

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CONTENTS

		Page
Introduction		1
Chapter I	: The Foundation of the Company and the first years of Settlement 1824-1834	4
Chapter II	: Farming Operations 1834-1842	29
Chapter III	: The Establishment of Tenants 1840 - 1851	35
Chapter IV	: The Company's Farming operations 1842-1853	46
Chapter V	: The Company's Labour force 1826-1853	55
Chapter VI	: The Company as an Absentee Landlord	61
Appendices		67

INTRODUCTION

This thesis represents an attempt to complete the history of the Van Diemen's Land Company from its foundation in 1824 to the dismissal of its first Chief Agent, Edward Curr, in 1842 which was begun by A.L. Meston and to carry the story on to 1860 by which time the Company had assumed what was essentially its final form.

At his death Meston had completed his history only up to 1828 although two topics, the location of the grant and the Company's relations with the aborigines are carried through to their conclusion, the former in 1847 and the latter in 1842. Meston deals in considerable detail with the foundation of the Company, the exploration of the area in which the grant was to be located and attempts to change the grant and therefore these topics have here been dealt with only briefly; much of the material Meston used for his section on the foundation of the Company is in any case located in London. Meston's papers, including the incomplete manuscript (which was later published[1]) and notes and references for the whole period the work was intended to cover are now in the possession of the University of Tasmania Library; the latter are not very detailed and it proved necessary to go through the outgoing dispatches, incoming dispatches and annual reports again. These records, now located in the Tasmanian State Archives, are the main sources for this thesis, together with the various returns of employees and livestock and minutes of the Court of Directors

1. A.L. Meston, The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842, Launceston, n.d.

and colonial Board of Consultation which were consulted where relevant. The outgoing dispatches are by far the most important of the Company's records as they describe in great detail everything that took place on the Company's estates; the incoming dispatches and the annual reports are less valuable as they tend to reflect what the Directors wanted to happen rather than what actually did happen, the annual reports in particular often showing a distressing ignorance of the Company's colonial environment and operations and a tendency to distort facts and figures.

The Company began with a colossal blunder in taking a grant of 250,000 acres in an area about which nothing was really known. The information given to the Directors about the north-western part of the island was admittedly misleading but they must have known that none of their informants had actually seen the area; the Directors appear to have convinced themselves that the whole of Van Diemen's Land was first-class sheep country because that is what they wanted to believe and had it not been for the doubts expressed about the north-west by the Government it is probable that they would have consulted even fewer "authorities" on the island than they did. It soon transpired that north-western Van Diemen's Land was quite unsuited to large-scale sheep-rearing and the Company after making many unsuccessful attempts to change the grant, was forced to save what it could from the wreck of the capital invested in the grant, first by selling livestock for breeding purposes and later by leasing and selling its land to private

settlers; the latter, together with farming operations on a small scale, has kept the Company in existence to this day.

CHAPTER 1

The Foundation of the Company and the First Years of Settlement, 1824-1834

On 12 May 1824 eleven men, all associated with the wool trade in London or the West of England met in London to discuss the formation of a joint-stock company to obtain a grant of land in Van Diemen's Land for the purpose of breeding fine-woolled merino and Saxon sheep on a large scale.[1] They were encouraged to do so by the difficulties experienced in purchasing wool in Europe, where the principal producers were Spain and Germany; these difficulties included foreign competition which forced up prices at a time when woollen goods were receiving keen competition from cotton, the cutting off of contiental supplies by war and the high cost of land transport for Saxon wool which James Bischoff, one of the founders of the Van Diemen's Land Company, claimed in his History of the Wool and Worsted Manufactures, made it cheaper to import wool from Van Diemen's Land than from Saxony.

Attention had already been drawn to Australia's wool-producing potential by Macarthur's introduction of merino sheep which after many vicissitudes had eventually proved highly successful and by the report of Commissioner Bigge on his visit to the colony between 1819 and 1821 in which he predicted that wool would become the principal source of income for New South Wales and recommended that land be granted to companies in proportion to the number of convicts

1. Minutes of Court 12/5/24

they employed and the livestock they owned. Bigge's report prompted the formation of the Australian Agricultural Company in April 1824 which received a grant of one million acres in New South Wales for the production of merino wool together with an undertaking that no incorporated or joint stock company with similar objects could be set up in New South Wales for twenty years. Van Diemen's Land had also been brought to the attention of the English wool trade by the fine quality of wool produced there and by three very favourable accounts of the island published in 1821 and 1822 by Messrs. Godwin, James Dixon and George Evans. These together with the recommendation of John Ingle who had spent fifteen years in the island and amassed a fortune there encouraged the decision to found the Van Diemen's Land Company. The first President of the Company was John Pearse and the first Vice-President Joseph Cripps, assisted by a Court of twenty-four Directors.[1]

On 22 May 1824 the Company applied for a grant of 500,000 acres in Van Diemen's Land. The Colonial Secretary Earl Bathurst was not satisfied that the required area of land of good quality could be obtained without interfering with existing private settlers[3] and the Directors had to seek further proof. John Ingle re-affirmed his previous view, which was supported by John Briggs who owned a large estate

1. Minutes of Court 17/5/24
2. Ibid 21/5/24
3. Ibid 9/6/24

in the island, that there was abundant unalienated land and also advised that the grant should be located in the northern half of the island and that two thirds of it should be situated east of the Western Tiers. On 13 July the Directors presented this evidence in support of their claims to the Colonial Secretary together with a request that the grant be located between 147° and 148° 20' East and 41° and 42° 35' South (that is approximately within the area east of Launceston and north of what is now Orford) and preferably on the east coast around Oyster Bay. Bathurst however remained unconvinced and took no action.[1]

At the end of 1824 Lieutenant-Colonel William Sorell returned to England after being replaced as Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land by Colonel George Arthur and in January 1825 at the request of Bathurst gave his opinion on the value of unlocated land in the island. He reported that only in the north-east and north-west were there extensive areas of unoccupied land and although he had a poor opinion of the former he considered that the latter area (which he had never seen) would contain sufficient good land for the Company's requirements, apparently on the principle that so large an area must contain good land.[2]

The Directors had meanwhile been cheered by the publication of a book about Van Diemen's Land written by Edward Curr, who

1. A.L. Meston, The V.D.L. Co., pp.12-13
2. A.L. Meston, op. cit., p.13

had been a merchant and farmer in the colony from 1820 to 1823. On being consulted by the Directors, to whom he had been recommended by Sorell, Curriinformed them that the north-east quarter of the island contained several extensive areas of good land not yet alienated; he knew little of the western part of the island but thought that so large an area must contain some good land.[1] The Directors were so impressed with Curr that in March 1825 he was temporarily appointed as Secretary of the Company[2] and later in the year was chosen to manage the settlement of the Company's grant, bearing the title of Chief Agent.

In February 1825 the Company again applied to the government for a grant of 500,000 acres. Bathurst, influenced by Sorell's belief that there was a considerable amount of good land in the north-west, agreed to the Company receiving 250,000 acres, but he would not sanction a larger grant because of the limited size of the island.[3] The grant was to be located in the north-western part of the island bounded on the north by Bass Strait and on the west by the Southern Ocean; the eastern and southern boundaries were left to be determined until it was known where the requisite area of useful land was to be found. The area of land suitable for pasture or cultivation in the grant was not to exceed 250,000 acres but as the shape of the grant was to approximate as near as possible to a square, the Company was permitted to take up an unspecified

1. Ibid
2. Minutes of Court 2/3/25
3. A.L. Meston, op. cit., pp.13-14

amount of useless land if necessary in order to complete a square figure containing the required amount of good land. The Company was to pay an annual quit rent of £1.10.0 for every £100 of the value of the useful land, but this was not to come into force until five years after the date of the grant; the Company could free itself of this rent by paying the Government twenty times the annual rental of the land. The Company accepted these terms and on 10 June 1825 the bill sanctioning the grant was passed by Parliament,[1] the Company Charter being granted the following November.

The Directors immediately commenced the appointment of officers, the hiring of workers under the indenture system and the purchase of livestock. It was decided to send out the Colonial officers in advance of the main settlement party to explore the area in which the grant was to be located and they left England on the ship "Cape Pachet" on 12 October 1825. The party included Edward Curr, the Chief Agent, Stephen Adey who was to be the general superintendent of the Company's farms, Alexander Goldie, the agricultural superintendent, Henry Hellyer, the chief surveyor and architect and Joseph Fossey and Clement Lorgmer, both of whom were surveyors. They arrived at Hobart Town on 4 March 1826 to be courteously received by the Governor[2] and after being delayed by a Court case arising from incidents on the voyage, Curr, Hellyer, Fossey and Lorgmer set out for the north-western part of the island.

1. A.L. Weston, op. cit., pp.16-17

2. O.D. 1 11/3/26

On 22 April the party corssed the Quamby River to enter the area in which the grant was to be located and first of all inspected the area at the foot of the Western Tiers known as the Western Marshes, which they estimated to contain 31,500 acres of good land; they were surprised to find that the area was far from being "several days journey from the inhabited districts" as Curr had assured Bathurst the grant would be and that flocks belonging to private settlers were already grazing there. Curr then moved northwards to the mouth of what was known as the second western river (which was named the Mersey later that year) where he arrived on 20 May. Here he examined the tract of land stretching eastward to Port Sorell on a grant of 2,000 acres and in order to get this grant revoked and prevent the further spread of private settlers into land which he considered reserved for the Company, Curr returned to Hobart Town to consult the Colonial Government.[1]

There followed the first of what were to be many disputes with the government over the location of the grant, in this case the result of the failure of the Colonial Office to clearly define the area in which the grant could be selected. Curr believed that the Company was free to select land anywhere between Port Sorell and Cape Grim, but Arthur claimed that Lord Bathurst had intended the Company to take land in the far north-western corner of the island remote from any private settlers.[2] When the dispute was referred to the Colonial

1. O.D. 8 14/6/26
2. O.D. 9 1/7/26

Office in December 1826 it transpired that both Curr and Arthur were partly right; Bathurst confirmed that he had intended that the Company be free to select land between Port Sorell and Cape Grim, but it was clear that he had only done so because Port Sorell was then still remote from the areas settled by private farmers. Bathurst agreed that the Company should neither be restricted to the far north-western corner of the island nor take up land adjacent to the settled districts, but he deferred any decision on the precise location of the grant until more was known about the whole area.

Exploration had meanwhile been continuing. A party led by Adey and Goldie left George Town on 27 April 1826 and for the next six weeks made a thorough examination of the north-west coast as far as Robbins Island; they discovered that a belt of what they called bad (connoting densely forested) country extended the whole way from the Mersey to Circular Head, but at the latter point there were tracts of up to 500 acres of open grassland and even more important the best harbour on the coast.[1] Curr therefore decided that on the arrival of the brig "Tranmere" which was bringing out employees, livestock and equipment from England, the ship would be sent to Circular Head to land her cargo and establish a settlement. (Curr had earlier intended to land the cargo at George Town, pending a decision on the grant.)[2] The wisdom

1. Adey-Curr 27/7/26
2. O.D. 16 4/9/26

of this decision was soon afterwards borne out by the arrival of a report of further exploration of the far north-west made by Goldie and Fossey in August and September 1826; in which Goldie estimated that there were between 50,000 and 60,000 acres of good land at Cape Grim and about 4,000 acres of open grassland at Circular Head,[1] their explorations had extended as far down the west coast as the Arthur River and also into the country east of Circular Head, making it fairly certain that the only suitable land in the far north-west was at Circular Head and Cape Grim. The "Tranmere" arrived at George Town on 29 September[2] and after various business had been transacted and the first nine convicts to be assigned to the Company taken on board, the ship moved up the coast to Circular Head, arriving on 24 October.[3] The first work undertaken was the construction of a jetty, from which a half-mile long road was built to the site of the settlement; here a store, stables, cottages for the free workers and huts for the convicts were erected. Cultivation was limited to a small area of vegetables, ploughing being deferred until the coming of the autumn rains.[4]

As soon as the Circular Head settlement had been established further exploration for good land was carried out and during Curr's first visit to Circular Head in January 1827, Lorgmer reported discovering 20,000 acres of good pasture in two tracts fifteen miles to the south-east,

1. O.D. 21 21/9/26
2. O.D. 24 5/10/26
3. O.D. 29 13/11/26
4. O.D. 42 13/2/27

although Curr placed little reliance on this.[1] During February 1827 Hellyer penetrated as far south as the mountains he named St. Valentines Peak and discovered a considerable area of open grassy hills, which from Hellyer's descriptions, Curr considered to be equal to the finest sheep country in the island. Curr therefore recommended to the Directors that if the grant could not be made to include both Cape Grim and the area discovered by Hellyer (which the latter had named the Surrey and Hampshire Hills) the former should be abandoned.[2]

The effect of this discovery on Curr's planning is obvious from the change in tone of his dispatches to the Court; whereas before he had emphasised the advantages of the Far North-West he now began to point out some of the disadvantages. There were probably only 60,000 acres of good land at Cape Grim, stretching in a narrow belt down the west coast and sufficient exploration had been carried out in the area to make it fairly certain that no more useful land of any great extent would be found. The difficulties of building a road (particularly the bridging of the numerous large rivers) from Circular Head to the settled districts were so great that the district was as difficult of access as an island, while Cape Grim was even more isolated.[3]

Curr decided to make a settlement (termed according to the Company's practice an Establishment) at the Hampshire Hills early in the spring of 1827. This would become the

1. C.D. 42 13/2/27
2. C.D. 51 22/3/27
3. C.D. 54 17/4/27

centre of the Company's farming operations, Circular Head being retained as a port for receiving stock from Europe at least until a port could be established nearer the Hills; it was therefore decided to reduce building at Circular Head to a minimum.[1]

The next task was to find a practible stock route to the Hills from both the north-west coast and the settled districts. Fossey set out from Launceston on 6 April 1827 to find a route from the Western Marshes to the Surrey Hills.[2] He reported to Curr that the route was practicable for the formation of a cart road although rough bridges of fallen logs would have to be made over some of the rivers. Fossey was ordered to proceed with the construction of the road and began work about August 1827.[3] Hellyer had meanwhile moved to Emu Bay, the nearest harbour to the Hills on the north-west coast and commenced the survey and construction of a road running south to the Hampshire Hills, a distance of some twenty one miles. When Curr inspected the road at the end of September 1827 it was completed for eight miles and a further four miles were blazed;[4] construction to the Hills was completed the following February.[5] Fossey's route from the Western Marshes reached the Hills about the middle of 1828 joining Hellyer's road from Emu Bay at the Hampshire Hills.

1. O.D. 54 17/4/27
2. O.D. 54 17/4/27
3. O.D. 62 14/6/27
4. O.D. 70 10/11/27
5. O.D. 11 28/2/28

Page number 14 was not used.

These two lines of access to the Hills were road in name only. Fossey's track from the Western Marshes, optimistically known as the Western Road, was in fact a rough track too steep even for carts; when James Backhouse travelled along it in 1833 it was so indistinct that his party had to search for blazed trees to find it.[1] The Company suffered most from the deficiencies of the road from Emu Bay to the Hills, which was the route over which the bulk of the stores and cattle passed; here the failure to clear sufficient trees to allow sunlight to penetrate to the road combined with the naturally damp and soft earth of the semi-rain forest through which the road ran resulted in the road becoming an almost impassable quagmire each winter. Curr's descriptions of the road after his various journeys over it range from "wretched" to "the worst road in the world."

The settlement at Circular Head had meanwhile been making fairly satisfactory progress. During the first few months there was considerable unrest amongst the indentured workers and assigned convicts over food and condtions and Curr found when he visited the settlement in January 1827 that almost everyone had a grievance. Curr considered that the general dissatisfaction was largely the result of the pessimism and lack of positive leadership shown by the Company's officers at the settlement, particularly Adey; he therefore decided to take charge at Circular Head personally[2] and took up residence at the settlement at the end of 1827

1. J. Backhouse A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies 1843, p. 127
2. C.O. 42 13/2/27

following the completion of his house. Ploughing began in April 1827 and about eighty acres were planted with wheat, barley, oats and potatoes. The soil proved to be lighter than anticipated and more suited to barley and turnips than wheat[1] so that Curr's hopes of exporting wheat to Swan River and Mauritius, expressed a few months previously,[2] seemed unlikely to be realised, even had there been a sufficient area of good clear land to produce a large surplus of grain over the Company's requirements.

Curr made his first visit to the Hills early in October 1827 and was very disappointed by what he saw. The Hampshire Hills contained only 9,000 acres of clear land, although the map made by Hellyer had suggested much more. The soil was generally of indifferent quality with rocky outcrops and all the characteristics of the pastoral areas of the settled districts (Kangaroo grass, peppermint gums, kangaroos and cockatoos)were absent; the only obvious asset of the district was an abundance of water.

Provisions were in such short supply that Curr's party was able to spend only one day on the northern edge of the Surrey Hills, a much larger area of grassland lying to the south of and at one point almost joining the Hampshire Hills. Curr found nothing to encourage him especially as Hellyer informed him that the section he had seen was typical of the whole area; the soil was poor and gravelly with the bedrock outcropping in many places, the grass coarse and wiry and

1. O.D. 55 14/5/27
2. O.D. 42 13/2/27

interspersed with rushes and scrubby plants and the climate was cold. Curr took as optimistic a view as possible of the area, claiming that the pasture could be greatly improved by burning and grazing, but he had to admit that the area "can never be a first nor even a second rate sheep pasture."[1]

In reporting to the Court how much Hellyer's descriptions of the Hills had been exaggerated Curr emphasised the Company's most fundamental weakness, lack of local experience. He continued, "Ever since my arrival in the colony I have found daily cause to regret that not one person in the service is possessed of Colonial Knowledge, and that circumstanced as they are, they can only acquire it by their own experience, often dearly bought. Had the Surrey Hills been discovered by a person who could have drawn a comparison between it and the old settlements I should have known its precise nature and value seven months ago as well as now."[2]

Lack of local knowledge proved a disability in establishing the settlements as well as exploring; here the Company, because of its isolation, was at a disadvantage compared to newcomers in the settled districts because it was unable to profit by the experience of neighbours. On visiting Circular Head in September 1827, Curr found that many of the sheep were foot-sore from grazing on land that was too wet; he therefore ordered them to be moved on to land that was drier although of poorer quality and found on his return from the Hills that their condition had greatly improved. Curr also found that Goldie had worked the oxen almost to death without regard for

1. C.D. 70 10/11/27
2. Ibid

the fact that they had arrived in poor condition, had no shelter or artificial feed and had to compete with the sheep for the natural feed. Ignorance of the suitability of various types of wood for building had resulted in poor quality timber being brought from a distance for fencing while better quality timber on the spot was ignored. Curr was able to correct some of these mistakes, but his own knowledge of local methods was only limited.[1]

The Company aimed to build up its flocks of fine-woolled sheep by purchasing large numbers of ewes of the best quality procurable in Van Diemen's Land and crossing these with imported stud Merino stock. The first stud sheep came out on the "Tranmere" in 1826[2] and further shipments during the next two years brought the number of Spanish and Saxon Merino sheep imported to some 1500; a small number of the coarser-woolled Cotswold sheep were also sent out.[3] The first colonial purchase of 1500 ewes was made in February 1827[4] and other smaller purchases followed. A start was made in shipping the locally-purchased sheep to Circular Head but Hellyer's discoveries at the Hills resulted in a change of plans and in May 1827 Curr reported that he intended sending only 200 more ewes to Circular Head;[5] the following September there were 1150 sheep at the settlement.[6] In November 1827 the

1. O.D. 70 10/11/27
2. A.L. Meston, The V.D.L. Co., p.58
3. Annual Reports 1827 & 1829 & O.D. 94 15/10/29
4. O.D. 41 13/2/27
5. O.D. 55 14/5/27
6. O.D. 69 (second part) 21/9/27

Company accepted an offer of 3,000 ewes which were to be delivered at Surrey Hills when the access roads were opened.[1]

As soon as the road from Emu Bay to the Hampshire Hills was completed a flock of some 500 sheep was shipped from Launceston to Emu Bay and driven in to the Hills.[2] Already weakened by the journey, they arrived during a long spell of abnormally cold and wet weather and there were heavy losses due to cold and foot-rot. The condition of the sheep was so poor that in May 1828 it was considered moving them to either Surrey Hills or to one of the small plains nearer the coast.[3]

Curr was cheered by the discovery of a new area of open rolling hill country in the Surrey Hills area south-east of St. Valentines Peak and some sixteen miles south of the Hampshire Hills;[4] visiting the new area (which was given the name Burleigh) in June 1828 he found the grass of better quality than that at the Hampshire Hills and the soil good, although most of the country was too steep to plough.[5] The 3,000 ewes purchased in November 1827 were brought intto the Surrey Hills over the Western Road from temporary pastures at Quamby, arriving in April 1829;[6] they joined the small flock from the Hampshire Hills which had been moved to Burleigh the preceding June.[7] The Surrey Hills consisted of belts of open grassland of several thousand acres each interspersed with forest,

1. O.D. 71 14/11/27
2. O.D. 15 7/4/28
3. Ibid
4. O.D. 31 11/6/28
5. O.D. 32 23/6/28
6. O.D. 66 13/4/29
7. O.D. 32 23/6/28

resulting in the flocks having to be spread over a wide area. Farms were established at Burleigh and also at a location given the name Chilton, situated some fifteen miles due west of Burleigh, while a number of shepherds out-stations were also set up on the various areas of grassland.

In September 1829 a settlement named Woolnorth was established at Cape Grim and part of the flock from Circular Head transferred there;[1] this was the first permanent settlement made at Cape Grim, although nearly the whole of the Circular Head flock had been pastured there for the summer of 1827-28.[2] The main attraction of Cape Grim area was its mild climate, the soil and vegetation being little better than that at the Hills. Hellyer estimated that the area contained about 27,000 acres of useful land, but when Curr made a thorough examination a year later he found that a considerable quantity of the "useful" land was actually scrub-covered sand and that the bulk of the remainder only just came into the category of useful.[3] The natural grassland was augmented by the clearing, draining and grassing of 800 acres of marshland during the early 1830s.

Thus by the end of 1829 the Company had occupied the only sizeable areas of natural grassland in the north-western part of Van Diemen's Land and even this had been attained only after prolonged negotiations with the government. In October 1827 the Company had gained the important concession of being

1. O.D. 94 15/10/29
2. O.D. 70 10/11/27 & O.D. 126 24/4/30
3. O.D. 156 22/11/30

able to break the grant up into four or five section of at least 50,000 acres each[1] and two months later the Colonial Office had agreed that the grant should be divided into three sections comprising 220,000 acres at the Hills, 20,000 acres at Circular Head and 10,000 acres in the central part of the island as a depot for stock being moved to and from Hobart Town.[2] This agreement between the Court and the Colonial Office in London was however made before Curr's appraisal of the true value of the Hills area was received and further changes were made following a conference between Curr and Arthur in January 1829, at which it was agreed to propose to the Government that the Company have 10,000 acres at each of the Hampshire Hills and Middlesex Plains (an area of grassland lying some miles to the east of the Surrey Hills) and 20,000 acres at Circular Head and that the remaining 210,000 acres should be divided as desired between Cape Grim and the Surrey Hills. The final agreement on the location of the grant was made between the Directors and the Government in April 1830 and the Company received a total grant of 350,000 acres comprising 150,000 acres at each of Cape Grim and the Surrey Hills, 20,000 acres at Circular Head and 10,000 acres at each of the Middlesex Plains, Hampshire Hills (contiguous to the northern boundary of the Surrey Hills) and the islands in vicinity of Cape Grim.[3] This acreage included an allowance of

1. A.L. Neston, op. cit., p.25
2. Ibid p.27
3. Ibid p.29

100,000 acres for useless land. The only important alteration made to the 1830 agreement was in March 1833, when the Government permitted the Company to exchange 50,000 acres of the Cape Grim block for the same area of land in a tract extending from the Hampshire Hills to Emu Bay;[1] this was done mainly to safeguard access to the Hills but a decade later the new land was to prove a valuable acquisition when the tenant farmer scheme was established.

The final allocation of the grant gave the Company nearly all the natural grassland in the north-western part of the island, the principal omission being that of a narrow strip of grassland extending some forty miles down the West Coast from Cape Grim of which the Company secured only the northern-most twenty miles; this was the result of the Government's desire to keep the form of the blocks granted to the Company as near to a square as possible and also of the assistant Government Surveyor J.H. Wedge's misleading reports of the rich soil and valuable forests of the hinterland of the area which made the Government unwilling to hinder access to the hinterland by granting a long section of the coastline to a private company.

Although the Directors were cheered by the good quality of the twenty-five bales which constituted the 1827 wool clip,[2] Curr realised the complete inadequacy of north-western Van Diemen's Land for the Company's operations. He therefore

1. A.L. Meston, op. cit., p.32
2. Annual Report 1829

urged the Directors to apply for a grant on the west coast of New Holland, pointing out that it would take at least two years to secure it by which time the existing grants in Van Diemen's Land would be stocked to capacity. When the Directors declined to take any immediate action Curr replied with a frank account of the present situation of the Company "... the Company cannot with its present possessions rise to that consequence and prosperity which was once hoped for. The principles on which the Company was founded were sound and judicious. There are some occupations much better in the hands of individuals than companies but I can undertake to say that the growth of fine wool on a very large scale can be managed as profitably by a Company as by individuals and I even think more so. In our case there is but one impediment to perfect success but that is a most important one and it is that our lands are not sufficiently good. They are not defective in soil, but they are in climate, and consequently in herbage. 250,000 acres almost anywhere in the old settlements would have kept 250,000 sheep but 250,000 acres here would not at present keep one quarter of that number" [1]

During the next four years the wisdom of this statement was to be forcibly borne home to the Directors. The settlements on the Surrey Hills at first progressed quite well and a considerable amount of money was spent on erecting buildings and fences. Stock losses from cold and hyenas (Tasmanian Tigers) were fairly heavy, but Curr was cheered by the marked improvement in the quality of the grass after it had been burnt and in March 1831 reported that he was once more pleased with the Hills each time he saw them.[2]

1. O.D. 159. 14/12/30
2. O.D. 171. 28/3/31

This optimism was short lived as the wet summer of 1831-32 which left the sheep in poor condition was followed by the worst winter yet experienced in the district in which over 1,000 sheep died of cold and nearly 300 more were killed by hyenas and native dogs.[1] The summer of 1832-33 was even colder than the last and the stock losses continued. Curr would have disposed of all the sheep at the Hills had Van Diemen's Land not been so overstocked with sheep that they were unsaleable, he therefore decided to leave 1100 of the best sheep at the Hills in the hopes that William Shilty, who replaced GeorgeRobson as Superintendent at the Hills in February 1833 would prove better able to care for them and to kill the remainder for meat either at the Hills or Circular Head. The flocks were never however divided apparently because of the incompetence of Chilty and the sheep remained in increasingly poor condition at the Hills.[3] There were further heavy losses from cold and wild animals during the winter of 1833, reaching catastrophic proportions the following spring when 300 lambs were lost in one night of snow.[4] The few remaining sheep seemed unlikely to live much longer and all were moved to Circular Head during 1834.

The sheep losses at the Hills were almost incredible; the Company sent some 5,500 sheep to the district (3,500 when the settlement was first established and 2,000 more in 1832) yet of these and all their progeny only a few hundred survived to be removed to Circular Head in 1834. The Directors informed

1. Annual Report 1835
2. O.D. 239 7/1/33
3. O.D. 247 22/3/33
4. O.D. 27 6/2/34

Shareholders in the reports for 1831 and 1832 that the Hills were most suited to the more hardy sheep with heavier fleeces and accordingly twenty-five Leicester sheep and a small number of Cotswolds were sent out to be crossed with the Van Diemen's Land sheep at the Hills; this however was quite futile as the sheep at the Hills were by then dying rapidly and with the exception of fourteen Cotswolds the imported sheep were kept at Circular Head and Woolnorth.[1]

Although natural conditions made it impossible for sheep to thrive at the Hills some blame for the very heavy losses must be attached to the three men who successively held the position of superintendent at the Hills between 1828 and 1835 as not one of them was a really competent farmer. Alexander Goldie was the first and best; Curr considered him well versed in the theory of farming,[2] but he appears to have been lacking in ingenuity, judgment and ability to control his employees,[3] all important attributes in a pioneer settlement. Thus Goldie's fencing, badly built with bad timber,[4] and his apparent inability to see when he was overworking horses and cattle or taking insufficient care with hew lambs were frequent sources of complaint from Curr. George Robson replaced Goldie in April 1830 and was in turn succeeded by William Chitty in February 1833; neither man made a favourable impression on Curr who while not blaming them for the failures of sheep rearing at the Hills felt that they had both taken a thoroughly defeatist attitude towards the whole venture and made little attempt to prevent stock losses[5]

1. I.D.76 20/2/33 & Statistical Returns for Circular Head and Surrey Hills 1832 onwards.
2. O.D. 108 4/1/30
3. O.D. 140 28/7/30
4. O.D. 125 25/4/30
5. O.D. 209 9/3/32, O.D. 239 7/1/33 O.D. 247 22/3/33

Chitty in particular appears to have been equally incompetent as a farmer, builder and book-keeper, all three accomplishments that were expected of the Surrey Hills superintendent.

Curr realised in 1833 that failure at the Hills was inevitable and in April of that year sailed for England to give the directors a first-hand account of the situation and consider what should be done.[1] It was agreed that attempts to keep sheep at the Hills should be abandoned and the district devoted to cattle which would gradually prepare the land for the re-introduction of sheep; Woolnorth and the Islands would continue to carry sheep while theCircular Head farm would meet the Company's food requirements and accomodate the stud horses. It was also decided to prepare part of the Circular Head area for tenants.[2]

The Company renewed its efforts to obtain land more suited to sheep-raising either in the north-eastern part of Van Diemen's Land or at Port Phillip. Curr favoured the latter place not only because it was known to be excellent sheep country but also on the grounds that Arthur would never permit the Company to take up additional land in the island because of his antipathy to it. Many applications for an exchange of land were made to the Colonial Office between 1834 and 1839 but to no avail and the Company resigned itself to making the best of the existing grant.

1. O.D. 248 12/4/33
2. Report to Special General Meeting of Shareholders 31/10/33 & Annual Report 1834

Curr saw in the failure to obtain new land the determination of Arthur to injure and oppress the Company but this is very questionable. The Company had received, with the relatively unimportant exceptions of the Port Sorell and Western Marshes districts, all the land most suited to sheep-raising in its natural state in the north-western part of Van Diemen's Land and this with many concessions from the Government the most notable being that of permission to take the grant in several separate blocks. The Company had obtained permission to take a grant after assuring the Government that there was adequate suitable land in the north-western part of the island although they were in fact almost completely ingorant of the area. Thus their fa lure was the result of their own folly and there was no reason for the Government to allow them to exchange their lands, particularly in view of the radical change in colonial land policy which had occurred since permission to select a grant was obtained in 1825; the 1831 regulations had terminated the granting system, replacing it with sale by auction at a minimum of five shillings per acre and there was no reason why the Company should be treated more favourably than private settlers in being given new grants.

Arthur's opposition to the Company receiving land in north-eastern Van Diemen's Land was explained by Curr himself when he told the Directors in 1835 that "the settlers are now at a loss to find available land in Van Diemen's Land".[1] The only possible course open to the Company would have been to buy land at Port

1. O.D. 85 23/12/35

Phillip, but this was apparently never even considered.

Although the story of the Company's attempt at large-scale sheep rearing is dominated by the disastrous failure at the Hills some mention should be made of the wool that actually was produced. The Directors were pleased with the quality of the wool received in London and reported that it realised generally high prices although they complained that insufficient care was being taken in washing and sorting the wool before it left the colony. The wool was sold on the open market in London; information on the buyers is limited but it is known that of the twenty-nine bales comprising the 1830 clip all but three were sold to Bradford worsted spinners[1] and that of the thirty-three bales comprising the 1831 clip at Circular Head and Woolnorth eighteen bales went to Yorkshire buyers and twelve to Gloucestershire buyers.[2] At sales in December 1833, August 1834 and January 1851, at least half the wool offered went to West Riding buyers.[3] In quality the wool produced was in view of the capital invested by the Company, completely inadequate. The largest clip the Company ever had in nearly twenty-five years of sheep rearing was that of 1832 which yielded 103 bales. The clip fell sharply after the abandonment of the Hills and only thirty-one bales of wool were despatched in 1835, although the total thereafter gradually rose reaching ninety-two in 1841 and then fluctuating between seventy and eighty-four until farming operations were abandoned.

1. I.D. 18 24/6/31
2. I.D. 29 17/9/31
3. I.D. 106 24/12/33, 120 19/9/34 159 1/3/37

CHAPTER 2

FARMING OPERATIONS 1834 - 1842.

After his return from England in November 1834[1] Curr managed the Company's affairs on what proved to be the correct assumption that they would have to do the best they could with the existing grant. To supplement the limited income from wool sales the Company began to exploit more fully the growing market for all kinds of livestock in the Australian colonies. Stock sales had hitherto been of only secondary importance because the Directors, not realising the limitations of their lands had wanted the maximum possible increase in stock numbers, but from 1835 onwards they provided the bulk of the Company's revenue.

There was a ready market for stock in Van Diemen's Land as farmers welcomed the new blood and high quality of the Company's animals as a means of improving their own. In 1836 the demand so exceeded the Company's ability to supply that Curr reported it was almost a matter of favour to sell stock.[2] Sales were however limited by the difficulties of getting stock to market. Until the government could be prevailed upon to build a proper road from the settled districts to the North-West the only means of transport was the Company's schooner "Edward" which was too small to carry the amount of stock required; sea transport was in any case unsatisfactory as rough weather or delays due to contrary winds, both common occurrences, had disastrous effects on the livestock on board. Curr repeatedly but vainly asked the Court to purchase a farm in the settled

1. O.D. 60 4/12/34
2. O.D. 96 22/4/38

districts (he suggested Cressy) where stock could be restored to good condition after the sea journey before being offered for sale and where a quantity of livestock could be held to take immediate advantage of favourable markets.[1]

The revenue from stock sales was at first gratifying reaching £6,800 in 1836, compared with only £537 for the 1836 wool clip although it should be noted that wool prices were abnormally low at the time the wool was sold. The fall in wool prices in 1837 hit Van Diemen's Land farmers hard and stock prices and sales fell sharply,[2] but by then prospects of new markets were opening up in the new colonies of Port Phillip and South Australia.

Curr had expressed hopes that Port Phillip would become a market for the Company's stock when the area was first settled in 1835[3] but it was not until late in 1838 that the first shipment of rams was made across Bass Strait.[4] Curr considered the settlers earlier disinclination to purchase stock was due to lack of money and insecurity of tenure.[5] Several shipments of rams, cattle and horses were made during 1839 and these realised generally satisfactory prices. Curr visited Port Phillip in September 1839 and was impressed with the rapid growth of the Colony[6], although he found that the farmers were very prejudiced against Van Diemen's Land rams which they considered too inbred, preferring stock from New South Wales. He accurately predicted that sales would fall off for two or three years but hoped that they might then revive[6]. Sales of

1. O.D. 196 15/4/40
2. O.D. 139 8/11/37
3. O.D. 83 4/12/35
4. O.D. 166 3/11/38
5. O.D. 163 14/9/38
6. O.D. 182 1/10/39

stud cattle and horses continued but any hopes of further revival were dashed by the collapse of the land boom in 1841 which caused a very severe financial depression.

While visiting Port Phillip in 1839 Curr was impressed by the good market there for building timber and blackwood staves for cask-making.[1] The blackwood on the Company's land subsequently proved unsuitable for splitting into staves, but a considerable quantity of planks and palings was cut at Circular Head for shipment on vessels taking stock across the straits.[2] The first shipment of 20,000 super feet of sawn timber was made in December 1840 and several more were made during 1841.[3]

In February 1838 Curr reported that"a great trade in live-stock is opening up with South Australia"[4] but this was apparently short-lived as later in the year he reported that stock prices in South Australia were lower than in Van Diemen's Land, that the colonists had little money and that they were in any case suspicious of the quality of Van Diemen's Land stock.[5] A shipment of 100 Saxon rams and a few bulls and horses was made to Adelaide in August 1839, but this appears to have been the only one the Company ever made to the Colony.

In February 1841 a cargo of 460 Cotswold ewe lambs and 20 Saxon rams together with 14,450 super feet of sawn timber was sent to Swan River[7] and made a satisfactory profit despite heavy stock losses on the voyage.[8]

The late 1830's were years of relative prosperity for the Company; no calls on shareholders were necessary between 1835

1. O.D. 185 11/11/39
2. O.D. 219 14/1/41
3. O.D. 224 1/3/41
4. O.D. 149 1/2/38
5. O.D. 159 7/8/38
6. O.D. 180 26/8/39
7. O.D. 225 2/3/41
8. O.D. 227 21/4/41

and 1839 and small dividends of five shillings per share were paid in 1837 and 1838. This prosperity was due to a combination of extensive sales of livestock and stringent economy in the Company's operations - the latter being achieved by severely limiting development work. The only major work undertaken was the draining, ploughing and grassing of 300 acres of marshland at East Bay on the Circular Head Peninsula which began in 1838.[1]

The Court came to view with increasing disfavour the policy adopted in 1833 of avoiding financial loss by strictly limiting development work and were particularly critical of the extensive sales of livestock which they considered hindered the building up of their flocks and herds. It was therefore decided in 1839 to make a call of One pound per share and to authorise Curr to spend £2,000 on the purchase of livestock and £2,000 on development work and the employment of additional labour.[2]

Curr did not apparently purchase any livestock but in August 1839 a small settlement named Dyersley was established at the south-east point of Robbins Island,[3] this however was abandoned within a year, Curr ascribing the failure to poor soil and the incompetence of the officer in charge of the settlement Samuel Dyer.[4] The bulk of the money was devoted to sending out and accommodating over 100 people consisting of indentured workers and their families.

During the late 1830's clashes between Curr and the Directors became increasingly frequent and serious. The Court and the Chief Agent differed on many points of policy, notably the

1. 8 O.D. 158 4/7/38. O.D. 163 14/9/38
2. I.D. 187 21/3/39
3. O.D. 179 2/8/39
4. 3 O.D. 196 15/4/40

establishment of tenants (which Curr opposed) and the sale of breeding stock (which the Court opposed) and each was inclined to blame the other for the slow progress made by the Company, but the most serious disagreement was over the Company's relations with the colonial authorities.

Curr had many virtues, including scrupulous honesty and an almost infinite capacity for hard work but he was quick to take offence and in his later years tended to see in the actions of anyone with whom he disagreed a desire to persecute him, a belief which in the case of the colonial government developed almost into a mania. Curr considered that the colonial government was doing all in its power to thwart the Company and adopted a belligerent attitude in his dealings with the authorities that strained relations almost to breaking point and caused the Court who were still making approaches to the Government about an exchange of lands, much concern. About the middle of 1839 the Colonial Secretary, Lord Normanby, passed on to the Court a despatch from Franklin in which the latter said he would have no further correspondence with Curr and the Directors decided to severely reprimand Curr and warn him that a repetition would bring his dismissal;[1] this was the last and most serious of a number of reprimands that Curr had received during the previous few years for using intemperate language in his correspondence with the colonial authorities.

Curr's most acrimonious dispute with the Government and that which led eventually to his dismissal was over the appointment of an independent Police Magistrate at Circular Head. When the

1. I.D. 191 4/7/39

Circular Head settlement was first established Adey was appointed a Justice of the Peace to deal with offences committed by convicts at the settlement and when Curr, who was already a Justice of the Peace replaced Adey at the end of 1827 he took over the duties of a magistrate. In 1832 Curr requested Arthur to appoint an independent magistrate so that cases incolcing free men, particularly absconding indentured servants, could be tried at Circular Head. This Arthur agreed to and appointed Alfred Horne to the position, but ordered the Company to provide the magistrate with free accommodation and to pay a portion of his salary, a condition that Curr strongly attacked on the grounds that it was an unfair tax on the Company.[1] Curr paid the required amount under protest until the period from October 1835 to March 1836, during which time Dr. John Hutchinson, whom Curr considered unfit to hold the post was Police Magistrate; Curr refused to pay the Company's share of the salary for this period and when, after much heated correspondence between himself the Court and the Government, he was ordered by the Court to make the payment, he informed the Directors that his dignity would not allow him to do so.[2] This was going too far and in September 1840 the Court decided to give Curr a year's notice of the termination of his appointment.[3]

Curr's dismissal was unfortunate but almost inevitable; he had done far more than any other officer to overcome the many difficulties which confronted the Company, but his increasing and inability to tolerate those whom he did not like made him unfit to hold the office of Chief Agent

1. Curr - Glenelg 27/7/36
2. O.D. 192 23/3/40
3. Private Dispatch Court - Curr 17/9/40

CHAPTER 3

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TENANTS 1840-1851

During Curr's consultations with the Court of Directors in 1833 it was agreed that the ultimate aim of the Company[1], assuming that it proved impossible to obtain land more suitable for sheep must be the establishment of tenant farmers on their estates. The Court had already issued a Prospectus to Emigrants with the Eighth Annual Report in March 1833, giving a glowing account of the Company's lands and offering to let Fifty acre farms, ten acres of which would be cleared by the Company, which would also assist in fencing and erecting buildings.

Although this offer failed to attract a single settler the Court continued to urge on Curr the desirability of establishing a tenantry.[2] Curr however felt that it was not advisable to try to attract settlers until the Company was better able to accommodate them, pointing out that quite apart from the expense of the scheme[3] there was already insufficient good land to meet the needs of the Company's own farming operations; there was in any case little hope of attracting settlers when a labourer at Port Phillip or in South Australia could earn more than a small farmer in Van Diemen's Land.[4] Curr's lack of enthusiasm was possibly also a natural reaction against suggestions from Directors who so often showed themselves completely ignorant of the Company's land and operations; an example of this ignorange is the Court's refusal to allow Curr

1. Report to Special General Meeting of Shareholders 31/10/33
2. I.D. 140 17/12/35, I.D. 160 20/4/37
3. O.D. 140 15/11/37
4. O.D. 189 26/2/40

to let the completely useless Middlesex Plains as a cattle run in 1835, on the grounds that the area should be kept for tenant farmers.

In 1839 the Court, fearing that the abandonment of the assignment system would cripple their own farming operations, sought alternative sources of income and issued new proposals to emigrants. They differed considerably from those offered in 1833, mainly in that the Company no longer offered any assistance in clearing and building. Uncleared land was offered to be let at two shillings per acre per annum, the rent for the first two and a half years to be expended in developing the farm and thereafter to be paid in cash to the Company. The first twenty settlers from England were offered leases of up to Twenty one years, but later settlers could not lease farme for longer than fourteen years. [1]

These proposals attracted three "gentleman" settlers, Captain Biggam and Messrs. Lavander and Romaine who arrived from England on the "Thomas Laurie" in February 1840. Captain Biggam declared that they had found in Circular Head "an earthly paradise", but as Curr pointed out "their future welfare must be the result of their own exertions and it is hard to say whether any of them will have an earthly paradise of their own ten years hence." [2]

Curr's doubts proved correct as none of the three appeared to have either the ability or the inclination to establish a successful farm. They had admittedly been greatly misled by the

1. Annual Report 1840
2. O.D. 190 29/2/40

Court about the quality and state of development of the Company's lands: the Directors must have known that the Surrey Hills were so bleak and barren that poor crops of oats were all that could be grown there, yet they allowed Biggam and Lavander to emigrate with the intention of settling there. Biggam intended taking up a section of Crown land adjacent to the Surrey Hills block and renting 100 acres of the latter from the Company but as the boundaries had not been surveyed (of which the Directors were aware) this was impossible[1]. Lavander brought a complete house with him in sections and was greatly incensed when he found that it was impossible to carry this in to the Surrey Hills,[2] although the Court subsequently claimed that they had attempted to dissuade him from bringing it. Both Biggam and Lavander abandoned their intention of taking up land and moved elsewhere although Lavander continued to bombard the Court with letters of complaint.

Romaine took up an eighty acre block of forest land near the mouth of the Emu River and by February 1842 had cleared fifteen acres and planted a crop of potatoes;[3] unfortunately he proved a poor manager and got heavily into debt with his employees and the Company finally abandoning the farm in 1843.[4]

The beginning of the depression in 1841 caused a sharp fall in livestock sales, then the Company's principle source of income and the Court, realising that tenants would provide not only a source of income from rents, but also a market for stock issued a new prospectus early in 1842, in which the offer to

2. O.D. 193 25/3/40
3. O.D. 1 25/2/42
4. O.D. 33 20/3/43

settlers was considerably altered and extended. In the 1839 prospectus the only areas open to tenants were the Emu Bay and Surrey Hills blocks. Now the Company offered blocks of forest land at Emu Bay and Circular Head Mainland (the area south of the peninsula) on seven year leases at two shillings per acre per annum, the first three years rent to be expended in improving the land and the remaining four years to be paid to the Company in cash or produce. At the end of seven years the tenant had the option of purchasing his farm at Two pounds per acre or giving it back to the Company, in which case he would be paid four pounds for every acre cultivated. The first fifty tenants were also offered 640 acre blocks at the Surrey Hills on the same terms plus the offer of credit of up to twenty years if they subsequently purchased the land and the free loan of ten cows and ten heifers for four years. Finally a few eighty acre blocks on Circular Head Peninsula were offered rent free for seven years without the right of purchase; the tenants' only liability was to fence the land and at the end of seven years he would be paid two pounds for every acre cultivated. This last proposal was apparently intended to overcome the problem of cleaning land for the Company's own farming operations after assignment of convicts ceased. The Court refused to let land to anyone with a capital of less than £400; this condition was a wise one as it guarded against penniless settlers taking up land and having supplies on credit from the Company for which they were unable to pay. [1]

These new proposals attracted only one settler from

1. Annual Report 1842

England, but they aroused considerable interest in Van Diemen's Land where they came at a time when several factors combined to make them particularly attractive. The first factor was that of the land situation in the Colony. All Crown land was sold by auction at a minimum price of one pound per acre, thus forcing intending settlers of limited means to expend most of their capital in purchasing their land; by contrast the terms offered by the Company allowed the settler to retain his capital to develop his farm and keep his family during the first years of occupation when returns would be small. There was in any case no good land left unalienated in the open woodland areas of the eastern half of the island and intending settlers had to turn to the wetter forest lands of the north-west and north-east; here the north-west coast was the most attractive area because of its excellent climate and soil, accessibility to sea transport and proximity to mainland grain and potato markets. Settlers on the Company's land were offered many other advantages including port facilities, cheap medical care and supplies and livestock obtainable on credit.

Without the knowledge of the Court Gibson held out an additional attraction to tenants in the form of an offer made in March 1842 to buy all their produce at fixed prices for seven years; he defended this offer against the Courts' criticism on the grounds that it removed the settlers' greatest objection to taking up the Company's land that of finding a market for their crops. Gibson believed that the agreement would be a profitable one for the Company, since the fixed prices were lower than those then obtaining in the colony

despite the depression, while even if prices did fall further the Company would not lose heart, as the amount produced by the tenants during the first seven years was not expected to be great.[1] Unfortunately prices did fall further and this combined with the embarrassing success of the tenants' crops caused the Company a loss of over £30,000 before the fixed price agreement finally expired in 1850. Nevertheless the agreement was a necessary evil, not only to attract settlers but also to save them from almost certain bankruptcy during the long depression.

Finally the influence of the depression in attracting settlers must be considered. Beginning in 1841 the depression brought to an end the attractions of high wages and plentiful employment in the mainland colonies and consequently the incentive to emigrate from Van Diemen's Land. The Company's offer to settlers thus came at a time when poor employment opportunities were encouraging people to go on to the land.

Gibson's forecast that tenants could be found in the colony proved correct. During 1842 fifty-four tenants took up nearly eight thousand acres of land, of which they had cleared over five hundred acres by the end of the year. On 30 June 1843 there were sixty-eight tenants renting 8,147 acres; of these seven rented 580 acres on Circular Head Peninsula, twenty-nine rented 3,260 acres on Circular Head Mainland and thirty-two rented 4,307 acres at Emu Bay.[2] The influx of settlers ended early in 1843, probably as a result of the Court's decision to

1. O.D. 45 9/9/43
2. Annual Report 1844

withdraw the fixed price offer (this did not affect those who had already settled)[1] and also because there was only a limited number of people in the colony who wished to go on to the land. Little more land was let for the remainder of the decade although the acreage under crop steadily increased reaching 867 at the end of 1843, 1640 in September 1846 and 2,799 in August 1850.

The tenants faced many difficulties in the first years of settlement and most found that their capital was soon exhausted in employing labour to help clear their land. Gibson estimated that at Circular Head Mainland and Emu Bay there were between twenty and thirty big trees per acre, interspersed with dense scrub; such land cost between Twenty and Twentyfive pounds per acre to clear and even then about ten trees or stumps had to be left in each acre.[2] It is quite certain that had the Company not advanced the settlers provisions on long credit and above all guaranteed them an income during the depression by the fixed price agreement many would have had to give up their farms as did some of those who had settled on Crown land on the North-West Coast.

Improving wages and conditions in the mainland colonies provided an attraction too strong for some of the tenants to resist and during 1847 nearly 3,000 acres of land (predominantly uncleared) were abandoned although despite this the acreage under crop increased during the year. Gibson claimed that most of those who had abandoned their farms were of a restless

1. No record can be found of date of withdrawal.
2. O.D. 108 29/7/47

disposition with grown-up families and having got into debt with the Company lacked the inclination to get out of it especially as they were now being forced to grow the more hazardous crop of wheat. [1]

From 1847 onwards the acreage leased slowly rose mainly as a result of letting additional land to existing tenants. The steady emigration from Van Diemen's Land to the more prosperous and convict-free mainland settlements made it very difficult to obtain new tenants although in 1848 a Mr. Henry Walpole came from Calcutta to settle on 160 acres of land at Circular Head Mainland which he purchased for Two pounds per acre. [2] In 1849 the Company advertised in the Melbourne and Adelaide newspapers, emphasising that there were very few convicts on the Company's land as compared with other parts of Van Diemen's Land. [3] The advertisements appear to have had little success.

Gibson's main concern from 1844 onwards was to sell the ever increasing volume of produce being delivered by the tenants to the Company under the fixed-price agreement. The tenants had to grow root crops, mainly potatoes, during the first few seasons of cultivation to break up the soil and as potato prices were very low until 1846 the Company lost heavily. From 1846 onwards potato prices rose in the Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney markets, but in Van Diemen's Land produce from the newly established convict probation farms flooded the market and prices slumped; Gibson reported that probation farm

1. O.D. 112 20/9/47
2. O.D. 117 5/6/48
3. O.D. 151 21/6/49

competition had caused the best potato prices at Hobart to drop from Seven pounds to One pound ten shillings per ton.[1] Protests from private farmers brought the system to an end in 1848 and prices in the colony improved.

Potato and wheat markets on the Mainland improved considerably, in 1846 and remained fairly satisfactory until late in 1848 when they again fell sharply following a trade recession. Prices reamined unsettled and generally low until 1851 when the discovery of gold in New South Wales began the upward movement which the Victorian gold rushes were to precipitate into a boom; this however was of little benefit to the Company as the fixed price agreement had expired in 1850.

A trial shipment of 2721 bushells of wheat was made to the Cape of Good Hope in July 1848,[2] but after being damaged on the voyage it arrived during a glut on the market and realised only £343 after shipping costs had been deducted.[3]

The heaviest losses were suffered in the sale of potatoes, but the tenants, happily protected from low prices by the agreement, were reluctant to turn to grain crops which were more liable to failure. From the Company's point of view however it was preferable for the tenants to have bad grain crops and consequently have less to sell to the Company rather than to have large crops of potatoes which could only be sold at a heavy loss. From 1846 onwards tenants in debt to the Company were forced to grow wheat instead of potatoes[4] and in 1848

1. O.D. 113 16/10/47
2. O.D. 119 10/7/48
3. Annual Report 1849
4. O.D. 112 20/9/47

Gibson made an agreement with all tenants to extend the fixed price agreement on grain for one year to include the 1850 season in return for the tenants agreeing to abandon the agreement on potatoes.[1] When the agreement finally expired on 30 September 1850 the Company had paid over £65,000 to the tenants in return for produce delivered to the store, but had recovered only £31,000 from re-selling it.

During 1849 the leases of the farms of the first tenants expired and the farmers purchased their land for £2 per acre according to the original agreement. By June 1850 when leases on all the land let during the first influx of settlers in 1842-43 had expired over 3,000 acres of land had been sold.[2] Every tenant appears to have purchased his farm, although not all purchased the whole area which they had been renting, either relinquishing it or arranging a new lease; the Company derived little immediate benefit from these sales as most were made on long credit. Further sales brought the total amount of land sold to 4,144 acres in July 1851.[3]

From 1850 onwards no fixed rules were followed for the sale and leasing of land, financial terms, the size of the block and the length of the lease being decided in the first case by the supposed value of the land in the others by the requirements of the settler. The area of new uncleared land alienated was small and all of it was apparently taken up by existing settlers. The clearing leases of the farmland on

1. Annual Report 1849
2. Annual Report 1851
3. Annual Report 1852

Circular Head Peninsula expired in 1850 and the land was re-let at much higher rentals; these combined with the rentals derived from the letting of the Company's own farms from 1852 onwards provided the Company's principal source of income for the next decade.

CHAPTER 4

THE COMPANY'S FARMING OPERATIONS 1842 - 1853

The story of the Company's own farming operations from 1842 onwards is one of gradual decline. Gibson's main concern was always the tenantry. and this combined with the collapse of markets in the depression and the desperate financial position of the Company, which necessitated a call upon shareholders of One pound per share almost every year between 1839 and 1851, resulted in expenditure on the Farming Establishments being reduced to a minimum.

When Gibson arrived in 1842, 1,070 acres were under cultivation mainly at Circular Head; of this total about 730 acres were laid down in improved pasture and the remainder in hay, grains and vegetables.[1] The Company had hitherto been self-sufficient in grain only in exceptionally good seasons, but Gibson hoped to make this self-sufficiency permanent; this aim was frustrated first by the influx of tenants requiring to purchase food from the Company, which necessitated the purchase of 1500 bushells of wheat in August 1842[2] and then by the destruction by fire of the Circular Head Store, containing 800 bushells of wheat in December 1842[3] In 1842-43 27 acres of forest land at Circular Head were cleared for cultivation[4] but by the time they were brought into production the tenants were themselves delivering stores to the Company.

In 1842 livestock sales were almost at a halt. After his last visit to Port Phillip on Company business in February 1842

1. Figures are for August 1840 (in Annual Report for 1841) but there is no record of any increase during the following 18 months.
2. O.D. 16 25/8/42
3. O.D. 25 31/12/42
4. Annual Report 1844

Curr reported that it was useless offering stock for sale there and he had been obliged to leave the stock he had brought over with him until markets improved[1]. Later in the year small sales were made at Port Phillip and Adelaide although the Company had to give long credit, but in March 1843 Gibson reported that prices in Launceston would not pay the cost of transport from Circular Head.[2]

The depression was at its worst in 1843 when stock sales realised only about £500, but from 1845 onwards markets slowly improved, although prices remained low throughout the 1840's. Fortunately the Company's dependence on outside markets decreased as the tenants demand for meat and livestock increased and by 1848 the tenants were buying all the stock the Company could fatten. Gibson laid down to grass several farms at Emu Bay abandoned by their tenants in 1847[3] and these together with the farm abandoned by Romaine in 1843 provided pasture for fattening cattle brought down from the Hills. In 1848 Gibson expressed hopes that the Company would soon be able to supply settlers on government land on the North-West Coast[4] and although this never eventuated stock sales during 1848 realised £2600, the highest figure achieved since 1841. Gibson estimated in 1850 that over three-quarters of the stock sold in the previous few years had been purchased by tenants[5].

Unfortunately fat stock breeding at Circular Head and Emu Bay was the only one of the Company's farming operations which gave any cause for optimism. Curr had let 9,900 acres of the

1. O.D. 251 25/2/42
2. O.D. 34 31/3/43
3. O.D. 112 10/9/47
4. O.D. 121 17/7/48
5. O.D. 173 23/4/50

Middlesex Plains in 1840 to Field Brothers as a cattle run[1] (the remaining 100 acres being retained by the Company for the use of any stock that might be driven along the Western Road) but the problem of the Surrey and Hampshire Hills was left for Gibson to face. The able superintendent of the Hills runs, Dr. Joseph Milligan resigned in February 1842[2] and was replaced by John Chambers whom Gibson considered both incompetent and difficult to get on with. Returns from the Hills were almost negligible: a small flock of sheep, the remnants of numerous experiments at breeding sheep in the district, provided a few bales of wool each year while there were small returns also from the sale of cattle and horses, of which the greater part of the Company's stock was at the Hills. In 1842 there were about 2,000 cattle at the Hills[3] and ten years later there were 2,400[4] the slow rate of natural increase having been approximately equalled by sales to tenants for meat and breeding. The horses proved a particularly heavy source of loss as they were expensive to keep and almost unsaleable. In January 1843 Gibson proposed that Chambers be transferred to Emu Bay[5] leaving about five men at the Hills stations to care for the stock and this was carried out after the Court's approval had been obtained. The Hills became almost a forgotten land; in February 1848 Field Brothers offered to rent the whole block and either rent or lease the cattle[6] but this was rejected by the Court possibly because the Directors still entertained futile hopes of establishing tenant farmers in the district.

1. O.D. 215 18/11/40
2. O.D. 1 25/2/42
3. Monthly Stock Returns for Emu Bay & Hills 1842
4. Annual Report 1853.
5. O.D. 28 26/1/43
6. Gibson - Secretary of V.D.L. 7/2/48

The most pressing problem confronting Gibson was that of overcrowding of pastures at Circular Head and Woolnorth; this also was a result of the depression which made it difficult to sell surplus stock and also hit the Company so hard financially that clearing of forest land for the extension of pastures had to be abandoned. Overcrowding at Circular Head was eased in 1842 by sending 500 ewes to Robbins Island;[1] these were leased with the island to Neil Macdonald, a former servant of the Company in 1844.[2] Overcrowding at Woolnorth where some 8,000 of the Company's 11,000 sheep were located was more difficult to remedy; the only way to increase the area of pasture was to clear and drain more of the marshland but this was prohibited by lack of funds and the only alternative was to reduce the number of sheep on the estate. In 1843 Gibson made an agreement with a station owner at Port Phillip to take 2,000 ewes and ewe lambs from Woolnorth and keep them for five or six years, giving the Company half the wool and half the natural increase of the flock;[3] the plan was however vetoed by the Court.

The Company were unfortunate to lose the able superintendent of Woolnorth, Adolphus Schayer, who resigned to return to his family in Germany in 1842; he was succeeded by Samuel Dyer whom Curr had thought incompetent although Gibson was at first inclined to think well of him[4]. Dyer was admittedly faced with the necessity of cutting expenses to the minimum but he appears to have made little effort to keep up the fences and marsh

1. O.D. 20 12/11/42
2. O.D. 52 8/2/44
3. O.D. 26 10/1/43
4. O.D. 16 25/8/42

drainage ditches which fell into disrepair. Most of the sheep on the run were pastured on land on the east side of the Welcome River in the summer of 1842 - 43[1]; this was poor land but it enabled the better pastures to recover from over-grazing. 200 sheep were moved to Perkins Island in June 1843[2] and 1000 more were sent to Circular Head the following year[3] but these were only temporary ~~pastures~~ palliatives. In August 1844 the Court asked Gibson to advise them on the best means of letting Woolnorth complete with the stock[4]. As Gibson predicted it was not easy to find a tenant but in January 1846 he arranged to let it, together with 6,480 sheep and lambs to Charles Marshall, a former book-keeper of the Company[5]. The Court refused to sanction the agreement on the grounds that a seven years lease (the term arranged) was too long[6] and instead Marshall agreed to run the estate as the Company Superintendent, replacing Dyer[7]. The run remained overstocked and the condition of the sheep became increasingly poor. A drought in the summer of 1847-48 burnt up the feed while heavy rain the following winter and spring combined with the bad state of repair of the marsh drains and embankments resulted in the marshland being flooded for many months in 1848-49, confining the sheep to the poorer natural pastures. The fences were also in poor condition but Gibson and Marshall agreed that it was better to let them decay and reduce the capacity of the run rather than pay an estimated £3,000 to repair them. There

1. O.D. 32 15/3/43
2. O.D. 39 12/6/43
3. O.D. 52 8/2/44
4. I.D. 231 7/8/44
5. O.D. 78 27/1/46
6. I.D. 238 30/5/46
7. O.D. 96 26/12/46

was no lambing in the 1849 season because of the poor condition of the ewes and the incapacity of the run to feed any more sheep. Marshall resigned at the end of January 1849 and was replaced by William Gibson, brother of the Chief Agent.[1]

Development work undertaken on the Company's lands during the 1840's was predominantly connected with the establishment of tenants; a considerable amount of money was spent on the survey of farmland and town sites at Circular Head and Emu Bay and also on the official survey of the Company's grants which was carried out by the government surveyor Sprent, between 1841 and 1844 and permitted the Company's Grant Deed to be finally executed by Lieutenant Governor Denison in July 1848, twenty-three years after the foundation of the Company[2]. Expenditure on the Company's own farms was of necessity cut to a minimum by the depression and the expense of the tenancy scheme; apart from normal maintenance works undertaken included the establishment of a farm at Emu Bay on land abandoned by tenants and small increases in cultivation and fencing at the other establishments.

During the late 1840's it became increasingly obvious that economic conditions in Van Diemen's Land were showing little improvement and that the Company's own farming operations held out little hope of ever being profitable. While the first tenants were establishing themselves the Company's farms were necessary to provide them with stores and livestock but by 1849 the tenants were sufficiently well-established to supply not only themselves but also any newcomer and Gibson was ordered to reduce farming operations to the lowest possible level, to sell off all surplus stock and lease farmland.[3]

1. O.D. 142 15/2/49. 2. O.D. 124 15/8/48
3. Private Dispatch Cattley - Gibson 25/10/49

At a special general meeting in London on February 26th 1851 it was decided that the Company's own farming operations should be wound up as quickly as possible, that one or two gentlemen residing in Van Diemen's Land should be temporarily appointed to assist Gibson in disposing of the stock and to investigate the colonial account and that a committee be appointed in London to examine the Company's affairs.[1]

The London committee, composed of one director and three shareholders delivered its report in February 1852. The report included a statement of expenditure and receipts from the formation of the Company up to the end of 1851 - a telling account of the failure of the Company's farming operations: against an expenditure of just over £300,000 receipts in London totalled only £34,054, of which £22,723 came from wool sales, £10,987 from remittances from the proceeds of stock sales and the remainder from the cargo of wheat shipped to the Cape of Good Hope in 1848; it should however be noted that sales of livestock and timber actually realised about £40,000, most of which was expended by the Chief Agent without ever being sent to London. By far the greater part of the cost of the Company's operations had been met by calls on shareholders, which totalled £265,000. The report ended on a hopeful note, anticipating a greater demand for land and rising land values following the influx of gold-rush immigrants; in view of this it was felt that land should leased for short terms rather than sold.[2]

1. Report of meeting included in Annual Report 1851
2. Report included in Annual Report 1852

The colonial assistants to Gibson were James Henty, whose firm had frequently acted as agents for sales of the Company's stock and Ronald Gunn, the Company's Launceston agent. They visited Circular Head in October 1851 and after conferring with Gibson it was decided that the Woolnorth, Surrey Hills and Hampshire Hills Blocks, together with the Company's farms at Emu Bay (about 300 acres) and Circular Head (1500 acres) should be advertised for lease; all livestock was to be sold[1] although the tenant of Woolnorth could if desired, lease between 2,000 and 4,000 sheep with the run[2]. Woolnorth was let for fourteen years in January 1852 to Dr. James Grant, who also purchased the sheep on the run[3] and the following month William Gibson leased the Emu Bay farm, also for fourteen years[4]. At Circular Head 330 acres of the Home Farm were let to Messrs. C. and W. Prince who had recently come out from England[5], and the remaining land was let in smaller lots to local farmers. All saleable stock at Circular Head was disposed of by the end of March 1852[6], leaving some 2,400 cattle at the Hills as the only stock left in the Company's possession; these were finally disposed of to William Gibson under an agreement made in November 1852 whereby Gibson bought all cattle existing at the Hills in March 1853[7]. Some difficulty was experienced in finding a tenant for the Surrey Hills, but in 1854 Field Brothers agreed to rent the whole block for a cattle run. The Hampshire Hills remained unoccupied with the exception of 1000 acres which were leased to William Gibson

1. O.D. 211 13/11/51
2. Launceston "Examiner" 15/11/51 p.759
3. O.D. 214 17/1/52
4. O.D. 215 10/2/52
5. O.D. 218 15/3/52
6. O.D. 219 31/3/52 7. O.D. 233 22/11/52

from 1854 onwards.[1] Of the islands Robbins and Walker Islands had already been leased to David Howie for fourteen years in 1850[2], while Trefoil Island was leased to Dr. Grant with Woolnorth.

1. O.D. 260 8/2/54
2. O.D. 174 4/5/50 and Rent List in Annual Report for 1860.

CHAPTER 5

The Company's Labour Force 1826-1853

The final abandonment of farming operations is a convenient point at which to consider a most important factor in the Company's history up to the time, namely the size, composition and problems of the labour force. The Company's workers fell into three groups, the first being those sent out from England under indenture, the second the free workers hired casually in the Colony and the third the assigned convicts.

About two thirds of all the indentured servants sent out were farm workers and shepherds and the remainder mostly building tradesmen; the terms of indenture ranged from two to seven years. The first group of fifteen came out in the Tranmere in 1826 to help establish the settlement at Circular Head and a second group of twenty-four arrived on the Caroline in January 1828. The shepherds proved very satisfactory and the tradesmen, although frequently complaining about food and conditions gave fairly good service.[1] Nevertheless, Curr believed the indenture system to be a bad one principally because the workmen soon realised that they could get higher wages elsewhere and came to resent the Company which bound them to an isolated pioneer settlement.

The arrival of a further fourteen indentured workers in March 1831[2] followed by ninteen more, most of whom arrived in March 1832[3] bore out Curr's criticism. The new men were intended mainly to replace those who had left the Company on the expiration of their term of indenture but they too, quickly became dissatisfied. In February 1832 two men absconded from the Surrey Hills, but were later arrested and brought before the Magistrate's Court in Launceston;

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1. OD 36 17/7/28; 2. Annual Report 1831; 3. Annual Report 1832.

their complaints of poor food and conditions were dismissed but the trial proved a disastrous one for the Company because Hugh Ross, their attorney, sought in a misplaced fit of zeal to prove by reference to the charter that the Company had a right to indent workers and in doing so revealed the fact that the indentures were for a period of years from the date of arrival in the Colony and not as stipulated in the charter from the date of the indenture. The date of arrival in the Colony could not be legally proved and the indentures were therefore invalid, although the men were bound to pay the Company the cost of their passage from England. Thus the indentured workers arriving in March 1832 found that they were not legally bound to the Company and the majority left almost immediately together with those who had come out the previous year[1]; by the end of 1832 only nine remained, these being mostly men who had no hope of getting a better job elsewhere.[2]

There was little the Company could do to remedy the situation. Arthur agreed to bring a bill before the Legislative Council to make the indentures valid by making them apply from the date of the signature[3], but there was a long delay before the Council met and the matter lapsed[4]; it would in any case have done little good as even had the men been caught and forced to return to the Company they would have been unlikely to have given good service. Both Curr and those who had absconded realised that it would be futile for the Company to sue for the recovery of the passage money as the expense of bringing witnesses to Hobart and the disruption of farm work caused by their absence would far outweigh the money recovered. The Company did sue several of the men and won the case,

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1. OD 212 4/5/32; 2. OD 237 11/12/32; 3. OD 212 4/5/32; 4. OD 162 11/9/38.

but as none had any money and all were apparently discharged as bankrupts it was a hollow victory.[1]

In December 1834 Curr offered on the instructions of the Court to release from indenture any of the remaining workers who would undertake to repay his passage money, an offer of which only a few took advantage: Curr attributed this to perversity[2], but it was probably due to a combination of lack of money and other opportunities of employment.

In 1839 the Court, alarmed by the approaching abandonment of the assignment system, decided to send out more free workers. Curr strongly attacked the proposal, remarking that "We have given the Indenture System ample trial years ago, and if it has signally failed with us, in almost every instance, we have only fared the same as every other Agricultural Colony, Company or Private settler almost without exception for the last three hundred years"[3]. Nevertheless, two further parties of indentured workers were sent out the first group of about fifteen men[4] arriving in February 1840[5] and the second group of thirty[6] men arriving in December 1841[7]. The indentures of the new men were binding but they had little else to recommend them; all but two of the first group were so lazy and incompetent that Curr described them as "no better than the ordinary average of convicts" adding that "whenever skill or trustworthiness is required it is not amongst the free men but amongst the convicts that we are obliged to look". The second group, together with their families, a clergyman and Curr's successor James Gibson, arrived without any warning from the Court to nearly double the population of Circular Head in a day, causing an acute shortage of food and accommodation. Curr reported that he approved of the majority of the second group[8] but Gibson found that they

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1. OD 162 11/9/38 (or ibid); 2. OD 61 27/12/34; 3. OD 184 2/11/39; 4. Annual Report 1840; 5. OD 29/2/40 6. Annual Report 1842; 7. OD 22/12/41; 8. OD 245 22/12/41.

quickly came to resent being bound to the Company and complained of poor conditions. Gibson's comments on indentured servants echoed those of his predecessor, complaining that they unsettled the other workers and he too begged the Court never to send out any more[1]; No more were sent out as by this time the Company's farming operations and labour force was steadily declining.

There are many reasons why the indenture system was an almost complete failure. Some of the blame must fall on the Court for making little attempt to discover whether the men were fit for the jobs they were being sent out to do and also for giving a misleading picture of the joys of life on the Company's farms; there is, however, no evidence to justify Colonial Secretary Montagu's accusations of kidnapping. There is likewise no evidence that food and living conditions were so poor as to be detrimental to health, although life in a pioneer settlement was inevitably spartan and above all very lonely, particularly for the men at the small out-stations; it is probable that most of the discontent among the indentured workers was the result of loneliness and boredom.[x]

The free workers engaged in the colony were a very mixed group; they were engaged singly or in small groups and as the Chief Agents seldom considered such engagements important enough to be mentioned in dispatches to the Court little is known about them. Some of the men were former indentured workers who had decided to return to the Company. Curr reported engaging two carpenters and two sawyers at Launceston in 1832, all of whom had formerly been indentured to the Company; they had decided to return because they found

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[x] Combined with the lure of very high wages for artisans in the settled districts, the result of the acute shortage of skilled labour.

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1. OD 12 29/6/42.

that the lower wages paid by the Company were more than counter balanced by the supply of free accommodation, water, firewood, vegetables and medical care. These men were engaged at pre-determined rates, the former at £60 per annum and the latter at 10/- per 100 feet of timber cut[1]. Other free workers were employed as shepherds, gardeners, grooms, bakers, shipwrights and carpenters. No records of the exact number of these employees are available but there were probably between forty and fifty in the late 1830's and early 1840's and about sixty in the mid-1840's when the last of the indentured workers from England had been discharged; the total thereafter gradually declined until farming operations were abandoned.

The bulk of the Company's labour force up to 1840 was provided by assigned convicts. Figures are not available for Woolnorth until December 1842 when there were only six ticket-of-leave men at the establishment, but records for Circular Head and the Hills go back to July 1832 when there were forty-one convicts at the former place and forty-three at the latter; at this time there were probably also about forty convicts at Woolnorth. Most of the convicts at the Hills were removed in 1834 following the removal of the flocks and by the end of that year only fifteen remained. The number of convicts at Circular Head rose to seventy-three in 1833 as a result of new assignments, fell to fifty by the end of 1835 and thereafter gradually rose again, reaching sixty-two in December 1838. The abandonment of the assignment system resulted in the gradual disappearance of convicts from the Company's labour force during the early 1840's, the last being withdrawn in late 1844 or 1845.[2]

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1. OD 212 4/5/32; 2. Figures are from monthly returns of population and livestock on Company's farms.

The convicts generally gave satisfactory service, the most serious exception being a group who planned a ~~meeting~~ mutiny at Circular Head in 1835; they were, however, given away and arrested before the ~~meeting~~ mutiny could begin.[1] There were occasional assaults and instances of disorderly conduct and stealing, but the Company's most frequent cause for complaint to the Convict Department was that there were so few tradesmen among the convicts assigned to them. The majority of convicts were used on cleaning and unskilled farm work and were also employed as shepherds, but tradesmen worked with the free workers on the jobs they were trained for.

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1. OD 64 6/2/35.

Bound incorrectly. Chapter 5 appears after appendices.

CHAPTER 6

The Company as an Absentee Landlord 1853-1860.

After the rounding up of the cattle at Surrey Hills had been completed at the beginning of May 1853 the remaining employees were dismissed leaving Gibson and the Launceston agent Ronald Gunn to manage the leasing and selling of the Company's lands[1]. They were mainly concerned with the arable and potentially arable land at Circular Head and Emu Bay and the Outgoing Dispatches deal predominantly with the progress of the existing farmers and the prospects of attracting new ones.

The Victorian gold rushes had a mixed effect on farming operations on the Company's lands. Many of the farmers and labourers went across to the diggings in the first excitement of the discovery although most of the former returned for the 1852 potatoe harvest. Gibson estimated that of those who went to the diggings one third did well, making from £150 to £300 each, one third just covered their expenses and the remainder lost; he considered that these mixed results had had a sobering effect on the settlers[2]. The gold rush caused an acute labour shortage which made the harvesting and shipping of produce across Bass Strait both difficult and expensive, but the farmers were compensated by very high prices; in July 1853 potatoes were selling at £14 per ton[3] and in the 1855 season reached a top price of £30 per ton. The boom collapsed suddenly in 1856, potatoe prices falling to as low as 25/- per ton, but wages remained high involving the Van Diemen's Land farmers in considerable financial difficulties[4]. Prices remained very low until 1858 when there was some upward movement, although there was another fall the following year. The 1856 price

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1. OD 244 23/5/53; 2. OD 220 7/4/52; 3. OD 248 5/7/53; 4. OD 272 17/6/56; 5. OD 280 20/11/56 (dispatch incorrectly dated 20/11/57)

collapse encouraged the settlers to grow grain instead of potatoes, but grain prices too were forced down by imports from South America.

Although the existing farmers continued to lease and buy additional land very few new settlers were attracted by the Company during the 1850's. This was hardly surprising in view of government land policy and the continuing depression in Van Diemen's Land. In 1851 Denison, in an effort to stem the tide of emigration from the Colony, brought in new land regulations offering anyone who purchased 100 acres the right over 1,000 acres for ten years; this offer resulted in the alienation of large areas of Crown land in the North-West although so many of the "settlers" merely cleared the land of commercial timber (which fetched high prices on the Victorian gold fields) and then abandoned it that the offer was suspended in 1854. The suspension proved of little benefit to the Company as the farming boom soon ended, while prospective settlers were in any case disinclined to take up land until the new regulations to be introduced following the granting of responsible government were known[1]. The new regulations were introduced in 1858, permitting selectors to purchase up to 320 acres at £1 per acre and resulted in a boom in Crown land sales during the 1860's although the immediate response was not spectacular; as the Company was then offering land for sale only at Emu Bay and this forest land at £2 per acre, their failure to sell land is hardly surprising[2]. The Directors were in fact almost reluctant to sell land, preferring to lease it in the hopes of later selling for higher prices[3].

The only development work carried out by the Company during the 1850's was the surveying of additional land for sale and of two township sites which

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1. Unnumbered OD 7/4/57, Annual Report 1858.
2. Annual Report 1859; 3. 1D 300 16/9/58, OD 320 13/12/58.

were laid out at the mouth of the Cam River (Port Maldon) and the mouth of the Black River (East Port) in 1856[1]. These town sites attracted few residents which in the case of East Port was hardly surprising as the area was one of poor soil covered by scrub and marsh.

The 1850's saw the isolation of the Company's lands considerably reduced by the settlement of Crown land along the North-West Coast and by improvements in communications, notably the introduction of a regular steamer service in 1854 which linked Launceston with Emu Bay and Circular Head[2]. There was still no proper road communication with the rest of the island, but in 1859 the first telegraph link between Tasmania and the Mainland was completed with the cable under Bass Strait coming ashore at Circular Head[3].

The Company gave little attention to the vast areas of grass, scrub and forest at Woolnorth and the Hills. Dr. Grant paid £300 per annum for Woolnorth and an additional £10 for Trefoil Island[4]; after attempting unsuccessfully to obtain workers in the Colony to settle at Woolnorth and share their labours between the estate and their own farms Grant brought out a number of families from Southern Scotland for the same purpose[5]. Field Bros. gave up their lease of the Surrey Hills in April 1858[6] and removed most of their cattle, although some were left with the Company's permission and others were too wild to catch. After unsuccessful efforts to find new tenants the Surrey Hills were again let to Fields in 1860 together with the Hampshire Hills and the Middlesex Plains for a total rental of £400 per annum[7], the Fields had been leasing the Middlesex Plains separately since 1840 and the Hampshire Hills since 1858, William Gibson having given up his lease of 1,000 acres of the latter in 1857.

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1. Annual Report 1857, Unofficial 1D 15/3/58; 2. 1D 263 31/10/54; 3. Annual Report 1860; 4. ibid; 5. OD 266 21/5/55; 6. OD 307 10/4/58; 7. Annual Report 1861.

The rents received for farmland at Circular Head and Emu Bay steadily rose, a result not only of letting new land but also of raising the rental of land when it was re-let after the original lease had expired or been surrendered. The bulk of the revenue came from the farmland on Circular Head Peninsula, particularly that which was originally part of the Company's own farm. Messrs. H. and W. Prince surrendered their lease of the 330 acre farm in 1855 after making £9,000 profit out of it in three years and the land was then broken up into smaller sections and let to several tenants at an average of £3-0-0 per acre per annum compared with only £1 per acre paid by the Princes[1]. Rents due to the Company in 1860 totalled £2,333, nearly two-thirds of it from land on Circular Head Peninsula; the first installment of Field's rental of the Hills together with other new leasings were expected to bring the total to over £3,000 in 1861[2].

Gibson sailed for a holiday in England in April 1854 and returned two years later, his duties being undertaken during his absence by Ronald Gunn[3]. On his return Gibson took up residence at Launceston and transacted most of the Company's business there, paying only occasional visits to Emu Bay and Circular Head; he was elected to the newly established House of Assembly as member for Devon in 1856[4].

The Court soon began to express concern at Gibson's many other activities, his infrequent visits to the Company's lands[5] and his failure to suggest means of increasing the Company's revenue[6]. The Directors belief that their Chief Agent was not doing his best to further the Company's interests was strengthened by various reports received from the Colony accusing Gibson of apathy and claiming that the Company's lands were not being exploited to the full[7]. The Court did

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1. OD 266 21/5/55; 2. Annual Report 1862; 3. OD 262 15/7/54; 4. OD 276 23/9/56; 5. ID 292 16/12/57; 6. ID 293 16/1/58. 7. ID 292 16/12/57.

not name the authors of these reports, but they were probably at least in part the work of the irascible and eccentric Reverend Zachary Pocock, the Anglican Minister at Emu Bay who had quarrelled with almost every member of the Gibson family. In 1858 the Court decided to terminate Gibson's appointment as from October 19th 1859[1] and to replace him with Charles Nicholls, a member of a Launceston firm of merchants[2], Gibson's dismissal is similar to that of Curr, both men to some extent deserving their fate but at the same time being unfairly held responsible for the slow progress made by the Company.

During 1858 the Court also decided to commission Sir Edward Poore to make a thorough inspection of the Company's lands which he did in January and February, angering Gibson by refusing to discuss the Company's affairs with him on the grounds that he was commissioned only to inspect the lands[3]. The only major recommendations in the report Poore submitted to the Directors were that the Hills were capable of heavier stocking and thus should be let at a higher rental and that the heathland at Woolnorth, the Duck River and East Inlet (Black River) should be sown with Indian couch grass to render them suitable for grazing. On receiving the report Gibson contested both recommendations, claiming that Field Bros. had already tried unsuccessfully to increase the capacity of the Hills and that experiments with couch grass in the Colony had failed[4].

The period from 1853 to 1860 was one of moderate prosperity for the Company and dividends of 10/- per share were paid in 1854 and 1857, although it should be noted that these were partly the result of the sale of all the Company's assets except the land. This financial success was, however, only gained by keeping

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1. ID 298 16/7/58; 2. ID 308 18/5/59;
3. OD 324 1/3/59; 4. OD 339 13/10/59.

expenditure to an even lower level than revenue and the Company's income was,in view of the huge sums spent since its foundation,minute.

The Van Diemen's Land Company must be seen as a failure in that the results achieved were out of all proportion to the capital invested.By 1860 the only tangible results of the sum of over £300,000 spent by the Company were two small farming communities and several stock runs of limited capacity and although the remainder of the nineteenth century was to see the gradual extension of settlement, the re-introduction of farming operations on a small scale and the construction of a tramway, later rebuilt as a railway, from Emu Bay through the Hampshire and Surrey Hills to the tin mines of Mt. Bischoff, nothing eventuated to prove that the expenditure up to 1860 was justified. The Company's contribution to the English wool trade was negligible and its contribution to the development of Tasmania by the introduction of stud livestock and the pioneering of the North-West Coast was of only limited importance as both would have soon been undertaken by private settlers.

The cause of the Company's failure was that only a small area of natural grassland in the grant was suitable for sheep and that the forest and marsh land, although much of it on land of good quality, could not be profitably cleared by the Company; the only method of clearing the land at reasonable cost was to do it gradually and finance the work by growing crops on the portion already cleared, but this method was suited to a small private settler and not a Company. That the Company failed, however, does not detract from its interest,and its long struggle for survival gives many insights into the contemporary Tasmanian environment and makes the history of the Van Diemen's Land Company one of the most interesting chapters in Tasmanian history.

APPENDICES

1. Revenue from wool sales.

2. Revenue from sales of livestock.

3. (a) The tenantry scheme.

   (b) Payments to tenants under fixed prices for crops agreement.

4. (a) Hellyer's map of north-western Van Diemen's Land published with the 1833 Annual Report.

   (b) Key to the above. Note that certain unjustified additions were made to the map in London, notably the "road" between Emu Bay and Circular Head which was a route only and not a formed track and the direct "road" from Hampshire Hills to Burghley which was projected but never built.

APPENDIX 1.

REVENUE FROM WOOL SALES.

Year	Bales	Receipts	Year	Bales	Receipts
1829	25		1841	89	£961
1830			1842	87	£1,073
1831	55)	£1,562[1]	1843	92	£1,321
1832	78)		1844	64	£1,165
1833	103		1845	84	£1,500
1834			1846	81	£1,600
1835			1847	74	£1,119
1836	31	£714	1848	81	£1,003
1837	37	£683	1849	70	£1,532
1838	40	£537	1850	84	£989
1839	50	£1,020	1851		£1,057
1840	64	£1,024	1852		£779

Note 1 : 9 bales not sold by date of report are excluded.
The year is that of the annual general meeting of the Company (held in mid - to late March) at which the figures were made available to the shareholders; the figures are for sales made since the annual general meeting of the previous year, the wool being from the clip of the year preceding the sales. Thus the figures for 1829 are for the sale of the 1827 clip which was sold between March 1828 and March 1829. Source: Annual Reports.

APPENDIX 2.

REVENUE FROM SALES OF LIVESTOCK

1836	£2,700	1842	£4,700[1]	1848	£1,742
1837	£6,800	1843	£600	1849	£1,088
1838	£2,400	1844	£1,276[2]	1850	£2,600
1839		1845	£552	1851	£1,764
1840	£3,491	1846	£1,119	1852	£2,139
1841	£3,400	1847		1853	£4,229

1. In addition £273 was received from sale of Myrtle and Blackwood, £50 from potatoes and £26 from turnip seed.
2. In addition £162 was received from sale of copper and £71 from timber.

Notes : (a) Source: Annual Reports. The year is that of the report in which the figures appeared; the figures are approximately for the twelve months preceding the middle of the year before that in which the report appeared, thus the 1836 figures are approximately for the period June 1834 - June 1835.
(b) The figures for 1851-53 include the sale of all the Company's livestock except the 2,400 cattle at the Surrey Hills.

APPENDIX 3(a)

The Tenantry Scheme.

	31/12/41	31/12/42	31/12/43	30/9/45	30/9/46	30/9/47	31/8/48	31/8/49	31/8/50	31/8/51
Tenants	1	55	65)	272)	331)	353)	369)	397)	410)	406
Labourers	10	67	179)	)	)	)	)	)	)	
Wives	1	32	43	80	78	88	102	111	134	137
Children	2	87	172	212	207	211	240	248	299	303
Total	14	241	459	564	616	652	711	756	843	846
Acres rented	365	8147	8999	9411	9411	6580	6741	7369	7042	7095
Acres Cultivated	15	581	1038	1294	1640	1854	2022	2487	2799	3123
Acres in crop	15	315	867	1294	1640	1854	1971	2487	2799	3123
Horses	-	17	18	25	28	32	67	72	101	109
Cattle	-	99	137	171	210	240	322	309	368	481
Swine	-	68	214	402	682	331	352	321	436	530
Cattle on loan	-	30	30	30	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source:- Annual Reports. No returns were made for 1844.

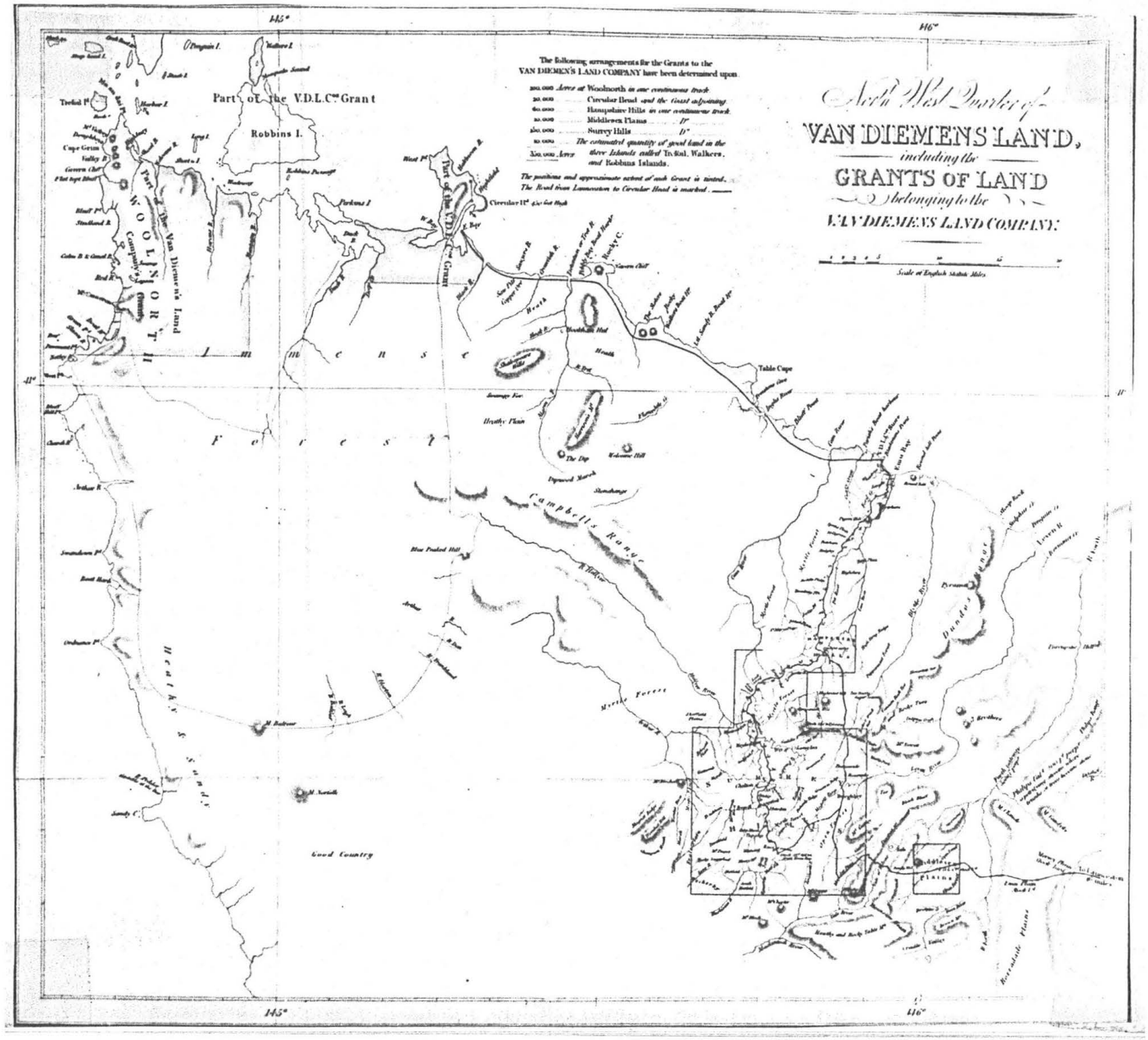
APPENDIX 3(b)

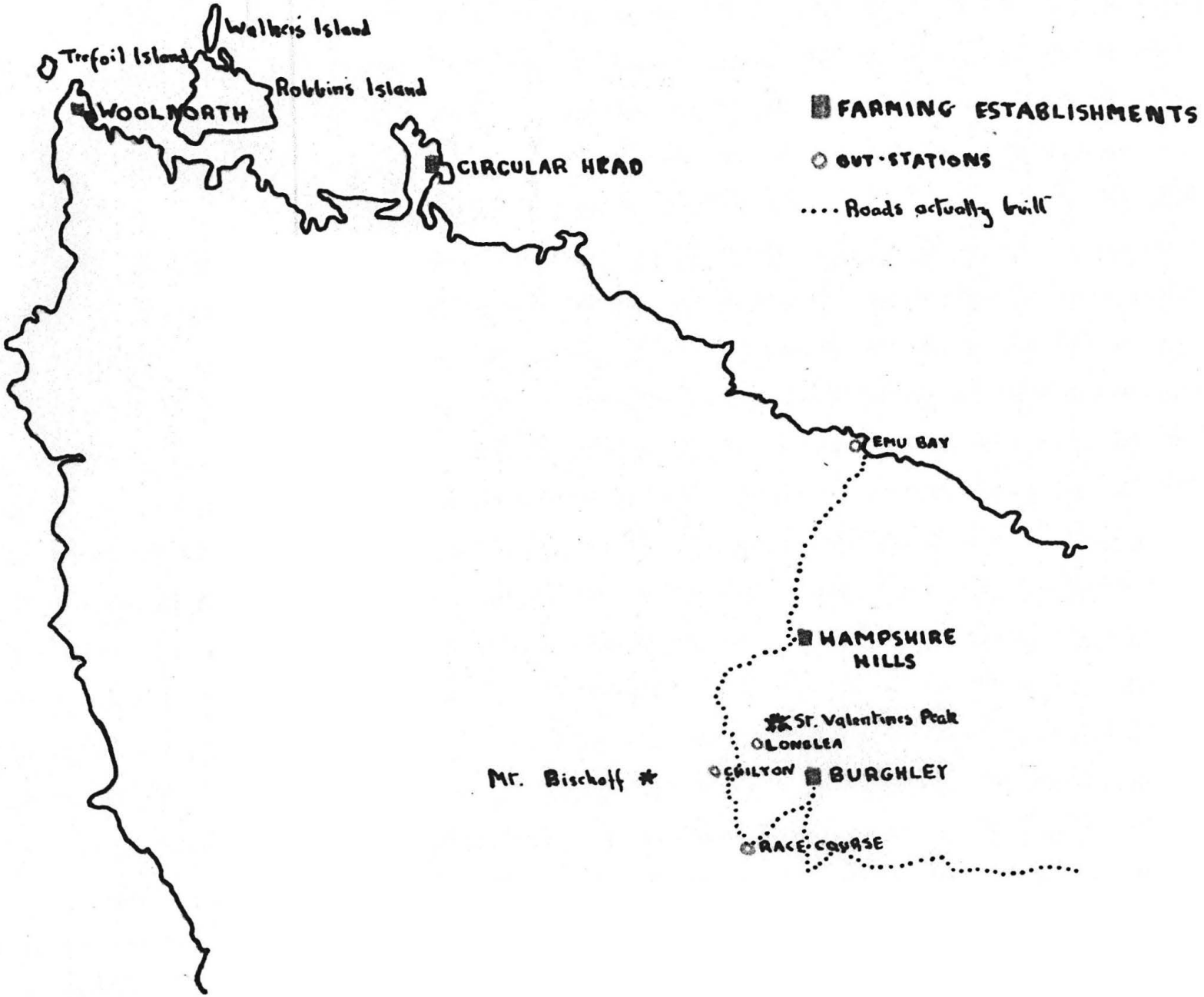
Payments to tenants under fixed prices for crops agreement:

1844	£5,293
1845	£7,888
1846	£9,873
1847	£12,550
1848	£14,445
1849	£8,825
1850	£6,703

Source: Annual Reports.

4(a)


North West Quarter of
VAN DIEMENS LAND,
including the
GRANTS OF LAND
belonging to the
VAN DIEMENS LAND COMPANY.
The following arrangements for the Grants to the
VAN DIEMEN'S LAND COMPANY have been determined upon.
250,000 Acres at Woolnorth in one continuous tract
20,000 ..... Circular Head and the Coast adjoining
60,000 ..... Hampshire Hills in one continuous tract
20,000 ..... Middlesex Plains ..... D°
250,000 ..... Surrey Hills ..... D°
20,000 ..... The estimated quantity of good land in the three Islands called Tr. Isl. Walkers, and Robbins Islands.
630,000 Acres
The positions and approximate extent of each Grant is tinted.
The Road from Launceston to Circular Head is marked.
Part of the V.D.L.Co.s Grant
Robbins I.
Part of the Van Diemen's Land Company's Grant
WOOLNORTH
Circular Hd
Table Cape
Campbells Range
Dundas Range
Heathy Plain
Forest
Scale of English Statute Miles
145°
146°
41°
40°


Walbers Island
Trefoil Island
Robbins Island
WOOLWORTH
CIRCULAR HEAD
FARMING ESTABLISHMENTS
OUT-STATIONS
.... Roads actually built
EMU BAY
HAMPSHIRE HILLS
St. Valentines Peak
LONSLEA
Mr. Bischoff
GILTON
BURGHLEY
RACE-COURSE